

Reviews for *Delaware River Suite & Fantasy CDs*

**Newark Star-Ledger** – January 16, 2009

UNUSUAL COMBO

“Delaware River Suite”

Bill Mays’ Inventions Trio (No Blooze Music #02)

Pianist and composer Bill Mays’ Inventions Trio – with cellist Alisa Horn and trumpeter and flugelhornist Marvin Stamm – offers beguiling originals and covers in an ace, if unusual, combination. The heart of the group’s second CD is the 7-movement title suite, which begins with Mays’ spoken introduction on his life-long affinity for rivers – including the Delaware, near which he lives. On the perky “Rapid Ride at Skinner’s Falls,” the players deliver criss-crossing, contrapuntal lines, creating a beaming sonic landscape. Mays’ firm touch yields rich, ringing notes, Stamm’s warm, expressive tone buoys his smart ideas, and Horn uses her bow to issue resounding textures. “Float” is free-form leaning; “Shohola Hoedown & Campfire” has a bright, country-esque flavor. May’s rumbling piano lines underpin “Rollin’ Down the Water Gap.” The partnering of two classic bop blues variants – Miles Davis’ “Sippin’ at Bells” and Bud Powell’s “Dance of the Infidels” – is spot-on. Jobim’s “Zingaro” has a lovely, delicate quality, as does Villa-Lobos’ “Bachianas Brasileiras #5.”

Mays’ trio appears Friday 23 and Jan. 24 at The Kitano, 66 Park Ave. at 38<sup>th</sup> Street, New York; (212) 885-7000; kitano.com.

–ZAN STEWART

**JazzTimes Magazine** - November 2007

The improvisational element so vital to jazz may not be an a priori feature of classical music, but rare is the alert jazz musician who doesn’t appreciate the melodic and harmonic riches to be found within the earlier genre.

Pianist Bill Mays is one such player, and with *Fantasy*, he explores the confluence of jazz and classical musics with unpretentious intelligence. His cohorts, trumpeter and flugelhornist Marvin Stamm and cellist Alisa Horn, are essential factors in the album’s sagacious mix of compositional rigor and improvisational ardor. While the classically trained Horn successfully reveals her inner urge to venture beyond the written notes, Stamm, the experienced jazzman, makes splendid use of his dazzling tone and robust delivery to bring themes to life. Mays, for his part, seems delightfully free of proving himself worthy of either genre; he just goes his own confident way as player, composer and arranger.

The album rightfully draws its title from the centerpiece of the project: a three-movement fantasy that weaves Mays’ attractive melodies together with integrated solos by the trio mates. Other than this opus, the threesome only confers on two other performances: luscious adaptations of Rachmaninoff’s “Vocalise” and Debussy’s popular piece, “Girl with the Flaxen Hair.”

The remaining tracks, recorded nearly four years before the trio performances, mate Mays and Stamm. “Baubles, Bangles, and Beads,” the Broadway standard culled from a theme by Borodin, and Gershwin’s “Prelude #2” receive bright renditions from two players obviously accustomed to each other’s ways yet still juiced by the interaction. The most ambitious duet pairs Bach’s “Invention #8” with Charlie Parker’s “Ah-Leu-Cha” (among smatterings of other bop classics), drawing on the contrapuntal natures of both compositions. Thanks to Mays and Stamm, Bach and Bird get along swimmingly. --STEVE FUTTERMAN

**Downbeat Magazine** - December, 2007 (4 stars)

Bebop meets baroque (as well as impressionism, romanticism and modernism) on this rich and playful classical crossover CD. Mays, in duet with trumpeter Marvin Stamm, and trio with Stamm

and classical cellist Alisa Horn, performs an original suite, "Fantasy," as well as melodies chosen (almost all from the classical repertoire) for their "beautiful melodies and rich grist for improvising."

The duets offer the clear highlights. On the Borodin-derived jazz standard "Baubles, Bangles, And Beads" and George Gershwin's "Prelude #2," they achieve a conversational drift across genre lines and a sunny sound that recalls some of Chet Baker and Russ Freeman's work. The closer has them sailing through Bach's "Inventions #8," giving way to Charlie Parker's "Ah-Leu-Cha." With the addition of Horn's cello on "Fantasy," Rachmaninoff's "Vocalise" and Debussy's "Girl With The Flaxen Hair," the trio sounds more scripted, more dramatic and less fun. "Fantasy," at more than 20 minutes, is lovely, with many sections and moods, but at times the stirring melodies and genre mixing give it the feel of film music. On the whole, however, it's an unusual and unusually easy-on-the-ears disc. Its pristine recording and warm mix of voices would make an obvious treat for audiophiles. --DAVID FRENCH

### **Jazziz Magazine - October, 2007**

Pianist Bill Mays knows and appreciates the history of jazz, but he's no hidebound traditionalist. Throughout his career, he's shown a penchant for exploring different combinations, and that's certainly the case with The Inventions Trio. On the opening "Baubles, Bangles and Beads," he and trumpeter Marvin Stamm engage in a playful musical conversation, and Stamm is a joy throughout. His playing has seldom sounded so effortless.

The third member of the trio, cellist Alisa Horn, makes her bow introducing the following "Vocalise" by Rachmaninoff. The three members balance one another nicely, with Mays exhibiting a mastery of the keyboard without dominating the music. Horn is the most delicate of the three, while Stamm's playing varies from bright to wistful, sometimes within the same phrase.

The three movements of Mays' "Fantasy" find the trio moving even further into classical chamber jazz, with Stamm employing a mute, then playing straight as he explores the melody. In the second movement, his growling and muted lines play counterpoint to Horn's inquisitive cello before Mays joins in to gently guide the proceedings. Stamm and Horn take turns leading the way, with Mays always offering gentle support.

The program also includes Gershwin, classicists Scriabin and Debussy, and finally, those all-time tag-team favorites, Johnny Bach and Charlie Parker. It's the concluding Bach/Bird medley "Invention #8/Ah-Leu-Cha" that brings things back from rarefied territory to swinging jazz, with the trio once again pared down to the duo of Mays and Stamm. It's when these players are at their jazzy best that the disc is most successful. --ROSS BOISSONEAU

### **HARTFORD COURANT - August 10, 2007**

Never once sounding pompous or academic, pianist/composer Bill Mays brilliantly blends chamber music and jazz with his Inventions Trio, injecting robust new life into familiar classical themes, jazz standards and original works. Improvising on themes by Bach and Bird, rocking on Rachmaninov, jamming on Gershwin or swinging on Scriabin is all fair game for Mays and his nimble-witted co-inventors, the noted jazz trumpeter/flugelhornist Marvin Stamm and the classical cellist Alisa Horn.

The loveliest of the CD's nine tracks--each an exquisite balance of composition and improvisation--is the fresh take on Debussy's "Girl with the Flaxen Hair." It's as light-filled and wrapped in atmospheric, domestic serenity as a portrait by the Dutch Master Jan Vermeer.

Absolutely the most fun is the swinging, crisply contrapuntal marriage between a theme by Bach and Charlie Parker's bebop classic, "Ah-Leu-Cha." Mays' a cappella solo on this hip hybrid is the perfect illustration of the blood-link between the surging, life-celebrating energies of Bach's

keyboard music and the great Bud Powell's equally miraculous bebop piano inventions.

Horn's dark, resonant cello adds tonal texture and heightens evocative moods, as on Mays' three-movement tour de force, "Fantasy for Cello, Trumpet and Piano." And, yes, the classically trained Horn can fit quite comfortably into a swinging groove, even in the extremely swift company of these two jazz masters of spontaneously shaped music.

--OWEN MCNALLY

**ALLABOUTJAZZ.COM** - August 28, 2007

<http://www.allaboutjazz.com/php/article.php?id=26734>

Between them, pianist/composer Bill Mays and trumpeter/educator Marvin Stamm have been around for approximately 634 years. These two have done it all, including duos and trios and quartets and quintets; big bands and studio work and TV and movies. They've also been friends for much of it, and aside from all the innovation and superb playing on this release, there's also the sound of a fond and enduring relationship.

That sound virtually defines the first track, a duo version of "Baubles, Bangles and Beads" where the piano and trumpet are so freely and happily interwoven that they sound like a pair of kids playing hide and seek. Such musical camaraderie continues throughout the program, which offers an intriguing blend of jazz and classical music. As Mays puts it, his goal is "to find the chamber music in jazz, and vice versa." He may well have reached that goal with this outstanding CD.

Four of the nine tracks are Mays/Stamm duets that were recorded in November of 2001. The gifted young cellist Alisa Horn joins them for the remaining five, as they become The Inventions Trio. But in truth, the whole CD is inventive—for one thing, the mix of piano, trumpet and cello is unusual in classical chamber music, where strings and brass rarely co-exist. It's not terribly common in jazz, either. Yet after hearing Mays' fascinating hybrid composition, "Fantasy for Cello, Trumpet and Piano," you end up wondering why it's not used more often.

Another one of this CD's pleasures is listening to Stamm's heraldic horn as it soars above the cello and piano; it must be said that few trumpeters, living or otherwise, can match the strength and purity of his tone. Also outstanding is the clever merging of Bach with Bird ("Invention #8/Ah-Leu-Cha"), and the Scriabin prelude that gets knitted into "Sometime Ago," done as a jazz waltz.

It's rare for classical music and jazz to nestle this comfortably together, but Fantasy is so tuneful and well-crafted that partisans of both sides will find much to enjoy—and those who already frolic in the third stream will be positively delighted. --DR. JUDITH SCHLESINGER

**MIDWEST RECORD RECAP** - August 9, 2007

BILL MAYS-Inventions Trio/Fantasy: With nothing to prove, after four decades of solid innovation and hard work, Mays simply wants to have fun. Always adept at mixing jazz and classical, the piano man does it again, but this time, he don't care if he's taken seriously. Not to say this set sounds tossed off, far from it, but Mays and co-horts are playing for the fun of it, using some various serious pieces as the starting point and letting things roll from there. Fusing Bach with Charlie Parker is an example of this fusion. After having made his bones by playing everything with everybody everywhere, he's earned the right to have a busman's holiday that turns out to be yet another tour de force. Jazzbos should take note.

**RIFFTIDES – Doug Ramsey on Jazz and Other Matters** - September 4, 2007

– excerpted from "Hello Cello" [http://www.artsjournal.com/rifftides/archives/2007/09/hello\\_cello.html](http://www.artsjournal.com/rifftides/archives/2007/09/hello_cello.html)

Bill Mays and the Inventions Trio, "Fantasy" (Palmetto)

Alisa Horn is the cellist in pianist Bill Mays' new group The Inventions Trio. She is a protégé of trumpeter Marvin Stamm, the other member of the trio. I wrote nearly a year ago about Mays convincing classical string players that they could swing when he recruited the cellist and violinist of the Finisterra Trio to perform Bach's "Two-part Invention #8" with an overlay of Charlie Parker's "Ah-Leu-Cha." Horn has been convinced, too. The conviction didn't come easily. She is added to the duo in which for several years Mays and Stamm have been melding jazz and classical music. A classical cellist ingrained with the notion that improvisation should be avoided at all costs because it could lead to (gasp) mistakes, she was terrified at the recording session. Here's some of what Horn wrote in a news release that came with the advance copy of The Inventions Trio CD.

What if I play a WRONG NOTE? During the session, I almost had a breakdown worrying about a shift that I had "missed" during an improvisation. No one else in the studio even heard the mistake or noticed it at all and these are some of the most experienced and well-trained ears in the business! (I was) almost in tears, worried over this horrible imperfection. Bill and Marvin looked at me and just said, "No one is ever perfect and that isn't what this is about. Screw it!" Since that moment, I have a new outlook on my music and the meaning of "perfect" has changed. Now I understand that perfection is an individual's perception of what the music is and this idea applies to both classical and jazz styles of playing. Horn is exquisite in the trio numbers on the CD, which include Debussy's "Girl With The Flaxen Hair" and "Mays' three-movement "Fantasy for Cello, Piano and Trumpet," an important new work. She is impassioned in Rachmaninoff's "Vocalise," and has a stunning introductory moment in the first movement of the "Fantasy." Mays and Stamm, collaborators for years, have developed an empathy that verges on the mysterious. Their duo numbers on this album are among their finest work. In the trio pieces, Alisa Horn complements their magic. She does not sound like a newcomer to improvisation.

The Inventions Trio will be a part of The Seasons Fall Festival next month, along with James Moody, Miguel Zenon, David Friesen, Karrin Allyson, Matt Wilson, Martin Wind, the Finisterra Trio and the Yakima Symphony Orchestra. I look forward to hearing them in live performance. –DOUG RAMSEY

### **ALL MUSIC GUIDE - September 24, 2007**

Pianist Bill Mays and trumpeter Marvin Stamm have been longtime friends, and have worked together on an occasional basis through the years. Cellist Alisa Horn considers Stamm to be her mentor, and she was introduced by the trumpeter to Mays in 2005. This CD has four trumpet or flügelhorn/piano duets from 2001 and four numbers (including the three-part "Fantasy") by the trio from 2005. Mays and Stamm have played classical duets as part of their repertoire in concert and, since Horn comes from classical music (though she is working at building up her improvising skills), the music often utilizes classical melodies including selections from Rachmaninov, Debussy, Scriabin, Gershwin, and Debussy. In two cases, the pieces are medleys that match together complementary classical and jazz pieces. These renditions of "Baubles, Bangles and Beads," "Vocalise," and Gershwin's "Prelude No. 2" are particularly memorable and Bill Mays' inventive and tasteful arrangements, along with the individual solos, make this a highly recommended disc.

-- SCOTT YANOW

### **JAMBASE.COM - September 23, 2007**

In the grand tradition of combining stuff, pianist Bill Mays and his Inventions Trio (featuring Marvin Stamm on trumpet and flugelhorn and Alisa Horn on cello) have concocted a serum that is equal parts jazz and classical music. I kid you not: on their new album, for instance, the closing track lumps

Bach's "Invention #8" into a medley with Charlie Parker's "Ah-Leu-Cha." Which, strangely enough, sounds pretty damn cool. And Fantasy is no fluke thing; Mays has been combining for years. The ivory-tickler once wrote a five-movement flute suite for jazz flutist Bud Shank, and has performed jazz arrangements of pieces by Mendelssohn and Rachmaninoff, who's "Vocalise" appears on Fantasy. But the main attraction on Mays' new record is the impressive title track, an original piece in three movements. One portion of the first movement almost rocks (almost!) before we enter a brief soul jazz jam, complete with walking bass lines plucked out on the cello. Movement 2 begins in an avant garde vein, before yielding to some achingly sad music. Movement ends on a triumphant note, with Mays crashing through chords, and Stamm growling through his trumpet. It's all very exciting, you see. It's classical, it's jazz, it's neither, it's whatever you want it to be. Check it out. -- BRAD FARBERMAN

**ALLABOUTJAZZ.COM** – September 19, 2007

Bill Mays and the Inventions Trio Featuring Marvin Stamm and Alisa Horn Palmetto (PM 2128)

Personnel: *Bill Mays, piano; Marvin Stamm, trumpet & Flugelhorn; Alisa Horn, cello*

Tracks: *Baubles, Bangles & Beads (Borodin/Wright/Forrest); Vocalise (Rachmaninoff); Fantasy for Cello, Trumpet & Piano - Movements 1 - 3 (Mays); Prelude #2 (Gershwin); Prelude Op. 11, #3/Sometime Ago (Scriabin/Mahanovich); Girl With The Flaxen Hair (Debussy); Invention #8/Ah-Leu-Cha (Bach/Parker)*

<http://www.allaboutjazz.com/php/article.php?id=26965>

Bill Mays and the Inventions Trio, "Fantasy" (Palmetto)

For those who have never seriously incorporated classical music in their musical diet, *Fantasy*, the new crossover album from pianist Bill Mays, trumpeter extraordinaire Marvin Stamm and cellist Alisa Horn, collectively known as The Inventions Trio, is a good starting point for some exposure to classical pieces rendered with a sensibility toward improvisation.

Mays, perhaps best known for his longtime association with the marvelous singer Sarah Vaughn, is a consummate musician who has taken classical works from Rachmaninoff, Debussy and Bach, sprinkled them with some Gershwin and some Charlie Parker for good measure, and interwoven them with arrangements that allow perfectly for wonderfully sensitive interplay by Stamm, the master of trumpet tonality, and Horn's haunting cello.

"Vocalise" is a sensitive piece that showcases Horn, while Stamm's crystal clear trumpet work is the perfect counterpoint to Mays delicate, lissome playing. Mays' beautifully arranged and written "Fantasy" suite is made up of three movements that build tension between piano and cello, while a soaring Stamm punctuates throughout. Having seen Stamm perform previously in a straight jazz trio setting many years ago, it was a treat to reconnect with this extraordinary and underrated player in a setting that showcases his impeccable tonal quality.

Mays shows his mastery of melding two seemingly incongruous musical forms by constructing a delicate bridge that allows access to areas of musical possibility that should be more fully explored. Horn's sensitivity is a welcome addition throughout. This outing makes a thoughtful addition for those who want to explore some Euro-centric, classical-oriented music done in tasteful way, while still satisfying the spontaneous creativity that jazz improvisation plied by master musicians can bring to any music from any source. -- RALPH A. MIRIELLO

## BAY AREA REPORTER - September 13, 2007

Oldies are still goodies  
by Jason Victor Serinus

### Bill Mays & The Invention Trio: Fantasy (Palmetto)

Pianist, composer and arranger Bill Mays has worked with the best in the business. He's accompanied and/or recorded with Karrin Allyson, Andrea Bocelli, Betty Buckley, Captain & Tenille, Rosemary Clooney, Leonard Cohen, Natalie Cole, Ella Fitzgerald, Aretha Franklin — I've stopped at F for lack of space. Early on, he played with the far out Frank Zappa and drag-attired Cycle Sluts, and was music director for Sarah Vaughan. Now, at age 63, he has little he needs to prove, but plenty of music yet to make. Mays founded the Invention Trio with Marvin Stamm (trumpet and flugelhorn) and Alisa Horn (cello) in order to explore the intersection of chamber music and jazz. They traverse quite a wide-laned thoroughfare, performing jazz improvisations on the Borodin-inspired "Baubles, Bangles, and Beads," Rachmaninoff's "Vocalise," Debussy's "Girl with the Flaxen Hair," Gershwin's Piano Prelude No. 2 and Scriabin's Prelude "Sometime Ago." The three-movement title composition, a through-composed Fantasy for Cello, Trumpet, and Piano, received inspiration from several great jazz and classical works, while Invention #8 (Ah-Leu-Cha) launches into a Bach quote before flying free. The trio's music has a good-natured, life-affirming joy about it that makes you want to play it quietly at twilight, and turn it up during the day. No wonder this smiling combo is about to play at both the San Francisco Conservatory of Music (September 24) and Piedmont Pianos (September 25). Mays is also set to duo with Martin Wind at New York's Knickerbocker (October 26-27).

### JAZZREVIEW.COM

<http://www.jazzreview.com/cd/review-19171.html> Sept. 4, 2007

Reviewed by Mark E. Gallo

Pianist Bill Mays and trumpet maestro Marvin Stamm open this exquisite collection with a delightful duo on "Baubles, Bangles and Beads." As impressive as the opening dialogue is, the program blossoms with the addition of cellist Alisa Horn on the following Rachmaninoff composition, "Vocalise." The trio likes to refer to their music as existing at "the intersection of chamber music and jazz." As stuffy as that may sound, this is anything but. The music is light, yet profound, enjoyable, yet obviously the work of three serious and accomplished musicians. The three-section "Fantasy for Cello, Trumpet and Piano," for instance, incorporates elements of chamber jazz that rise above previous efforts in that there is a more dramatic flair. There is a breathing quality to the title movements that lends them the quality of musical life well lived. Each of the movements feature the musicians separately and in interaction, in a fashion more commonly associated with jazz, though the structure is more closely aligned with the classical forms. Mays and Stamm come from a jazz background, but Ms. Horn came from a classical background, with no real concept of improvisation. This is something she learned and now excels at.

May's solo on Gershwin's "Prelude 2" is percussive. When Stamm joins in he maintains that percussive feel, giving it a New Orleans-style bluesy taste. The following "Prelude Op 11 #3," attributed to Scriabin, allows Mays to shine in a classical context under Stamm's lilting trumpet.

Horn re-joins the duo on Debussy's "Girl With the Flaxen Hair." As the two previous compositions served as spotlight pieces for piano and trumpet, respectively, this showcases cello to some degree, even though there are extended sections that spotlight each of the instrumentalists. The closing

piece, entitled "Invention #8/Ah-Leu-Cha," is that intersection realized. Here is a combination of compositions from both JS Bach and Charlie 'Bird' Parker, a couple of icons if ever there were. This is another piano/trumpet duologue on which the playing is simply spectacular. This comes highly recommended.

**THE NEWARK STAR-LEDGER Sept. 2007 Reviewed by Jill McManus**  
Bill Mays and the Inventions Trio, "Fantasy" (Palmetto)

To his successful mix of sparkling, sometimes rambunctious piano with Marvin Stamm's lyrical trumpet, Bill Mays has added here the cello of Alisa Horn, a prize-winning young artist. In nine chamber-jazz creations, including Mays' original "Fantasy" in three sections, the musicians serve up a fabulous treat made from the finest ingredients. Switching from a waltz to 4/4 midway, a light-hearted "Baubles, Bangles and Beads" starts off the three-way conversations. Mays wraps Scriabin's Prelude Op. 11 #3 around "Sometime Ago," and takes off from Bach's sprightly Invention No. 8 for solos on Parker's "Scrapple from the Apple." In "Fantasy," a fanfare leads to mellow flugelhorn, braided with piano and sometimes doubled by cello. Then a rhythmic pulse from plucked piano and cello strings sets a dancing, driving pace. The three musicians share a remorseful melody that moves over two chords and gradually becomes rapturous, then a rhythmic bittersweet theme with variations.

**ROCHESTER DEMOCRAT & CHRONICLE**

Critic's Playlist - Aug. 24, 2007 Reviewed by Jack Garner

Bill Mays and the Inventions Trio, "Fantasy" (Palmetto)

The lyrical pianist has formed a new trio with the unusual configuration of a trumpeter (Marvin Stamm) and a cellist (Alisa Horn) to explore the connections between improvised jazz and structured classical music, what an earlier jazz generation called "ThirdStream." The resulting chamber jazz is eloquent and quite lovely, with a stronger rhythm foundation than you might expect from a small ensemble with no conventional bass-drums rhythm section. The material features a wide spectrum, from Rachmaninov and Debussy to Gershwin and Mays himself.

**HARTFORD COURANT.COM**

Friday, Aug. 24, 2007 | See! Hear! Reviewed by Richard Kamins

Bill Mays and the Inventions Trio, "Fantasy" (Palmetto)

Bill Mays is a fine pianist who has worked with a slew of great artists, from Barry Manilow to Gerry Mulligan to Frank Zappa. His recent trio recordings on Palmetto display his wealth of talent, from bluesy solos to classical chordings. For his latest release, Mays combines a duo session he recorded with trumpeter Marvin Stamm with a classical work he composed for his "chamber" trio with Stamm and cellist Alisa Horn. The duo tracks shimmer with sweet melodies, from "Baubles, Bangles and Beads" (from the musical "Kismet" but based on a melody by Russian composer Alexander Borodin)

to George Gershwin's "Prelude # 2." Mays' uncluttered piano riffs (that sound based on the work of "Fats" Waller and Teddy Wilson) are a perfect foil for the stentorian tones of Stamm (who can also "get down" on the blues changes.) The final track, titled "Invention #8/ Ah-Leu-Cha", that fuses Baroque forms to Miles Davis' be-bop composition, is a real delight.

The centerpiece of the recording is the 4 trio tracks. Opening with Rachmaninoff's "Vocalise", the 3 musicians weave in and around each other, exploring the rich harmonies and melodic possibilities. Mays' 3-part "Fantasy" has definite 20th century sensibilities in that one can hear whispers of Dvorak, Copland, and others throughout the piece. But, one should set aside labels when listening to this work and revel in the rich sonorities of the cello, follow closely the melodic adventures of the trumpet, and hear how Mays makes it not only flow but also swing. "Movement 1" sets the groundwork by exploring the various sonic and structural possibilities of the music while "Movement 2" is slower, more introspective, but no less melodic. The final section, "Movement 3", has more rhythmical variation (with the feel of Brazilian music as well as "walking" bass lines) and Mays' willingness to take the listener on a melodic adventure. It's "serious" music that's fun.

### **THE BUFFALO NEWS: ENTERTAINMENT**

Listening Post/Brief reviews of select releases Monday, Aug. 20, 2007 Reviewed by Jeff Simon

Bill Mays and the Inventions Trio, "Fantasy" (Palmetto)

Trumpet, piano and cello is not your everyday jazz trio. That much is certain. That's why this disc begins without Alisa Horn's cello so that you can contemplate pianist Bill Mays and trumpet player Marvin Stamm playing "Baubles, Bangles and Beads" in a tradition that probably goes back to Earl Hines and Louis Armstrong playing "Weather Bird Rag." But then Horn joins in and the strange but lovely ensemble richness presents itself with an improvisation on Rachmaninoff's "Vocalise" and provides some odd but compelling stylistic back-and-forth between jazz and classical music throughout the rest of the disc. And all of it is shapely, graceful and completely convincing.

### **Jazz.About.com**

#### **Bill Mays and The Inventions Trio: "Fantasy" (Palmetto Records)**

From John Matouk <<http://jazz.about.com/mbiopage.htm>>

August 17, 2007

#### Guide Rating - The Bottom Line

A skilful combination of modern jazz and classical themes, Fantasy is an album that is challenging, yet highly melodic and listenable. A notable achievement.

#### Pros

- Mays's trio is unique and his approach reinvigorates great classical and jazz music.
- The playing is executed beautifully throughout, and the recording is superb.
- "Fantasy" is a fun and unpretentious opening into the music Rachmaninoff, Bach and Bird.

#### Cons

\* You won't hear any drums on "Fantasy," so pass if that's one of your requirements.

#### Description

- Pianist Bill Mays explores the intersection of chamber music and jazz on his latest Palmetto

release Fantasy.

- Mays leads The Inventions Trio featuring Marvin Stamm on trumpet/flugelhorn and Alisa Horn on cello.
- Mays has been heard on hundreds of recordings with legends like Ron Carter, Sarah Vaughan and Frank Sinatra.
- Mays has also performed for films like Being John Malkovich and on television programs like Dallas.

Guide Review - Bill Mays and The Inventions Trio: "Fantasy" (Palmetto Records)

Occasionally, the issue of the origins of improvisation in jazz arises in reader email. I also encountered the topic as I recently viewed the fine jazz documentary All the Notes about avant-garde pianist Cecil Taylor (screened at the current Miami Jazz Film Festival <<http://www.miamijazzfilmfestival.org/>> ).

One of the film's commentators explains that before the era of recordings, the great classical musicians like Bach and Mozart were also accomplished improvisers. These days, we generally think of the jazz and classical genres as distinct. Jazz is highly improvisational and rhythmic. Classical emphasizes the virtuosic interpretation of repertoire. The reality, especially from the jazz point of view, is not as separate.

As guitar legend Kenny Burrell has indicated, jazz often attempts to bridge the classical and the popular. This is true on all ends of the spectrum. Count Basie was recently cited as an exemplar of minimalism by a critic in The New York Times. Duke Ellington rewrote Tchaikovsky's The Nutcracker Suite in a jazzy style. And avant-gardist Taylor is conservatory trained.

Bill Mays, a jazz pianist often praised as "beyond category," is comfortable with the classical repertoire (like Ellington, he arranged "The Nutcracker"). On his latest album Fantasy, Mays leads his talented Inventions Trio through a lively, melodic mix of improvisations based on classical themes and jazz standards. Most of the pieces take classical standards and build improvisations on them. There's also a fine, original composition by Mays at the center of the album, and terrific playing by trumpeter Marvin Stamm and cellist Alisa Horn. Fantasy is a winning record that should please any fan of jazz who also enjoys Bach or Debussy. It's also a pleasant, unpretentious way for fans of classical and film scores to learn more about "America's Classical Music."

## **AUDIOPHILE AUDITION WEB MAGAZINE**

Aug. 10, 2007 Reviewed by John Sunier

Bill Mays and the Inventions Trio, "Fantasy" (Palmetto)

When I read that leading pianist Bill Mays' new group was created to explore the intersection of chamber music and jazz I was immediately interested. He is one of the few jazz artists who sometimes includes classical repertory into a jazz context - in common with people such as Roger Kellaway's Cello Quartet, jazz cellists such as Oscar Pettiford and Fred Katz, and going back to the Swing Era - the many big bands and groups like John Kirby's which often played classical themes.

In the 1970s Mays was asked by jazz flutist Bud Shank to write a five-movement flute suite, which he did. (Odd that Shank now wants nothing to do with the flute anymore, calling his old group with Laurindo Almeida "The LA Snore.") In the 1980s Mays did a jazz arrangement of The Nutcracker Suite - which Ellington had also done earlier. He's also written sax quartets, works for the Aureole chamber ensemble, and scores for numerous TV shows and films. Trumpeter Stamm appears as soloist with symphony orchestras and as a member of the George Gruntz Concert Jazz Band. Cellist Horn's entire background until recently was entirely in the classical world. She played in the Civic Orchestra of Chicago and as principal cello in the Henry Mancini Institute Orchestra. She reveals in

the album's note booklet how scary it was for a classically-trained musician to face improvisation. Horn was sure she played notes wrongly until her compatriots assured her there was really no specific wrong or right.

This is a rather unusual makeup for a trio playing any sort of music, but it works beautifully - might I even say inventingly? - on the nine tracks. The Rachmaninov Vocalise has been transcribed dozens of different ways - in fact there is an RCA Red Seal CD compiling a bunch of them. The Trio's version is one of the finest I've heard. Gershwin's Second Prelude for Piano has also come in for some unusual transcriptions, and the Trio's is highly successful here. Other delights are the Scriabin Prelude and Debussy's Girl with the Flaxen Hair. May's own extended Fantasy - the disc's title tune - mixes the two genres with great skill and reminded me in some parts of Claude Bolling's chamber-jazz Suites. On the strength of this their first album, I'd say that both Stamm and Horn have gotten the hang of jazz improvisation just fine.

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